

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT IC
SUBJECT: COALITION REJECTS OPPOSITION PLEA TO RESIGN

REF: (A) REYKJAVIK 098 (191647Z JAN 77); (B) REYKJAVIK 0109
(DTG 211612Z JAN 77)

1. IN WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MAINLY PUBLICITY-GATHERING EXERCISE, OPPOSITION MP'S, MOSTLY FROM SDP, CALLED ON GOVERNMENT TO RESIGN AS PARLIAMENT RECONVENED JANUARY 24 AFTER HOLIDAY RECESS. COALITION LEADERS REJECTED APPEAL, INSISTING THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD REMAIN IN OFFICE AS LONG AS IT HAS PARLIAMENTARY MANDATE.

2. RESIGNATION DEMAND WAS LED BY SDP ALTHING GROUP LEADER GYLFI GISLASON, WHO CITED AS REASONS BOTH POLICY FAILURES, ESPECIALLY IN ECONOMIC AREA, AND THE LOSS OF PUBLIC TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND JUDICIAL SYSTEM AS RESULT OF UPSWING IN CRIME AND CORRUPTION. GISLASON
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DID NOT OFFER NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION, BUT RATHER URGED PRIME MINISTER TO TAKE "RESPONSIBLE" COURSE AND VOLUNTARILY DISSOLVE COALITION.

3. GISLASON DID NOT SINGLE OUT EMBATTLED PROGRESSIVE PARTY IN HIS CRITICISM OF JUDICIAL SYSTEM, NOR DID HE IDENTIFY HIS RESIGNATION DEMAND WITH OTHER RECENT

CALLS FOR EITHER PURGE OF PP MINISTERS OR DISSOLUTION OF CABINET (REFTELS). HOWEVER TIMING AND WORDING OF HIS APPEAL MADE IT OBVIOUS THAT HE WAS SEEKING POLITICAL MILAGE FROM PP'S EMBARRASSMENT. PEOPLES ALLIANCE MP LUDVIK JOSEFSSON TOLD PARLIAMENT THAT HIS PARTY SUPPORTED RESIGNATION DEMAND, BUT IN HIS REMARKS JOSEFSSON CONCENTRATED ON GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICY SHORTCOMINGS WITH ONLY PASSING REFERENCE TO PP'S DIFFICULTIES. (PA HAS TAKEN CARE THROUGHOUT NOT TO GIVE UNDUE OFFENSE TO ITS ERSTWHILE AND POTENTIAL FUTURE COALITION PARTNER ON THIS SENSITIVE SUBJECT.)

4. PRIMEMIN HALLGRIMSSON LED COALITION'S RESPONSE, BY DEFENDING GOVERNMENT RECORD AND ASSERTING THAT IT WOULD BE IRRESPONSIBLE OF HIM TO ABDICATE. HE CRITICIZED OPPOSITION FOR ADVOCATING FACILE SOLUTION TO DIFFICULT PROBLEMS IN ABSENCE OF ANY ALTERNATIVE POLITIES OF THEIR OWN. HE STRESSED INTENTION OF KEEPING COALITION TOGETHER AS LONG AS IT ENJOYED PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT, ALTHOUGH ADDING THAT HE WOULD NOT HESITATE TO DISSOLVE GOVERNMENT IF HE FELT IT WOULD GENUINELY SERVE NATIONAL INTEREST.

5. PP CHAIRMAN OLAFUR JOHANNESSEN, SPEAKING FOR HIS PARTY, CHIDED GISLASON FOR LATTER'S ROUNDABOUT APPROACH, SAYING THAT IF SDP WANTED TO CENSURE GOVERNMENT OR CERTAIN MINISTERS IT SHOULD HAVE INTRODUCED NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION AND NOT MERELY MADE PLEA TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRIME MINISTER TO DO WORK FOR THEM. JOHANNESSEN WENT ON TO OFFER LENGTHY DEFENSE OF GOVERNMENT'S POLICY IN JUDICIAL MATTERS, DETAILING EFFORTS BEING MADE TO CLEAR UP VARIOUS CRIMINAL CASES THAT HAVE ALARMED COUNTRY OVER PAST SEVERAL MONTHS.

5. COMMENT: SIGNIFICANCE OF SDP'S FRUITLESS EFFORT LIES CHIEFLY IN RESPONSE IT ELICITED FROM GOVERNMENT. THOUGH SIGNS WERE ALREADY IN EVIDENCE THAT COALITION HAD DECIDED IT COULD RIDE OUT CURRENT STORM (REF B), ALTHOUGH DEBATE GENERATED CLEAREST STATEMENTS YET TO THIS EFFECT BOTH FROM RESPECTIVE COALITION PARTY CHAIRMAN AND FROM GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPERS IN FOLLOW-UP EDITORIALS TODAY.
BLAKE

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